

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 03714 151746Z

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSC-01 OMB-01 EB-08 TRSE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9584

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIUM ELECTS A NEW PARLIAMENT SUNDAY

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY: SOME 6.5 MILLION BELGIAN VOTERS WILL ELECT A NEW PARLIAMENT

SUNDAY IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS CALLED 40 DAYS AGO BY PRIME MINISTER

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PAGE 02 BRUSSE 03714 151746Z

LEO TINDEMANS TO BREAK A POLITICAL IMPASSE WHICH STRAIT-JACKETED HIS  
THREE-YEAR-OLD GOVERNMENT. THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN LACKLUSTER  
AND WITHOUT FOCUS ON SPECIFIC ISSUES. PROFESSIONAL OBSERVERS EXPECT  
THE BALLOTING TO REGISTER ONLY MINOR CHANGES IN THE RELATIVE STRENGTH  
S

OF THE DOZEN PARTIES CONTESTING THE ELECTIONS. PRIME MINISTER  
TINDEMANS IS EXPECTED TO REGISTER A CONSDIERABLE PERSONAL SUCCESS,

AND HE IS LIKELY TO BE THE KING'S FIRST CHOICE TO TRY TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT COALITION. TINDEMANS' PREFERENCE IS TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE WITH HIS CHRISTIAN PARTY'S CHIEF RIVAL, THE BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY, IN A COALITION THAT WOULD REPRESENT NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF THE ELECTORATE. END SUMMARY.

1. BELGIAN VOTERS WILL ELECT 212 DEPUTIES TO THE LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT IN A SIMPLE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SELECTION SYSTEM. IN EACH ARRONDISSEMENT COMPETING PARTIES OFFER CANDIDATES LISTED IN ORDER OF THE PARTY'S PREFERENCE. VOTERS MAY CAST THE BALLOT FOR THE WHOLE PARTY LIST OR CAST A PREFERENCE VOTE FOR INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES. IN LIKE FASHION 106 MEMBERS OF THE 182-MEMBER UPPER HOUSE, OR SENATE, WILL BE ELECTED, THE REMAINDER BEING SELECTED INDIRECTLY AT A LATER DATE.

2. IN THE KEY LOWER HOUSE (ON WHOSE CONFIDENCE THE GOVERNMENT

DEPENDS), THE PARTY LINEUP IN THE DISSOLVED CHAMBER WAS AS FOLLOWS:

CHRISTIAN PARTY - 72 SEATS (50 HELD BY THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLES PARTY (FLEMISH) AND 22 BY THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (FRANCOPHONE).

BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY - 59 SEATS (OF WHICH 33 FRANCOPHONES AND 26 FLEMISH).

LIBERAL PARTY - 36 SEATS (OF WHICH 21 REPRESENTED A SEPARATE FLEMISH LIBERAL PARTY, 12 THE WALLOON LIBERAL PARTY AND 3 THE BRUSSELS LIBERAL PARTY.

VOLKSUNIE (FLEMISH LINGUISTIC PARTY) - 22 SEATS.

RASSEMBLEMENT WALLON (WALLOON LINGUISTIC PARTY)- 10 SEATS.

FRONT DEMOCRATIQUE FRANCOPHONE (BRUSSELS LINGUISTIC PARTY) - 9 SEATS.

BELGIAN COMMUNIST PARTY - 4 SEATS.

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PAGE 03 BRUSSE 03714 151746Z

3. A FIVE-WEEK ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS PRODUCED NO DOMINANT CAMPAIGN ISSUES AND VERY LITTLE INTEREST AMONG VOTERS REQUIRED BY LAW TO GO TO THE POLLS. LEFTWING SOCIALIST TACTICIANS IN WALLONIA SOUGHT WITH LITTLE APPARENT SUCCESS TO LURE LEFT-LEANING CHRISTIAN PARTY VOTERS INTO A "PROGRESSIVE FRONT" COMMITTED TO RADICAL ATTACK ON BELGIUM'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ILLS. FRANCOPHONE PARTIES ASSERTED - WITH LIMITED CONVICTION - THAT THE ISSUE WAS THE "CVP STATE," I.E. DOMINATION OF BELGIUM BY TINDEMANS' PARTY, WHICH IS FLEMISH AND IDEOLOGICALLY OF A CENTER-RIGHT CAST. THE ISSUE OF HOW BELGIUM IS TO BE RE-STRUCTURED INTO A DECENTRALIZED FEDERAL STATE - THE PROXIMATE CAUSE OF THE SURRENDER OF THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT IN MARCH - WAS ONLY CURSORILY DISCUSSED IN THE CAMPAIGN. (NO ONE HAD ANYTHING NEW TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT.)

4. PROFESSIONAL OBSERVERS EXPECT THAT THE NEW PARLIAMENT WILL LOOK VERY MUCH LIKE THE ONE IT WILL REPLACE. ACCORDING TO A WIDELY-ACCEPTED CONSENSUS: (1) TINDEMANS' FLEMISH CHRISTIANS (AND HE PERSONALLY) WILL

IMPROVE SOMEWHAT ON THEIR SUCCESSFUL 1974 SHOWING; (2) THE SISTER SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (FRANCOPHONE) IS LIKELY TO SUFFER LOSSES IN WALLONIA; (3) THE CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL PARTIES ARE LIKELY TO ROUGHLY MATCH THEIR 1974 SHOWING; (4) THE SOCIALIST PARTY IS LIKELY TO IMPROVE

ON 1974 IN WALLONIA AND SUFFER A SETBACK IN FLANDERS; (5) THE LINGUISTIC PARTIES IN BRUSSELS AND FLANDERS WILL HOLD THEIR OWN OR SLIP A BIT WHILE THE WALLOON RALLY IS LIKELY TO LOSE SOME GROUND.

END UNCLASSIFIED

5. COMMENT: IF THE VOTERS PERFORM AS THEIR PULSE-TAKERS EXPECT, TINDEMANS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE THE FIRST POLITICAL LEADER ASKED TO TRY TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT. HE WOULD FIRST TRY TO FORM A COALITION OF THE CHRISTIAN AND SOCIALIST PARTIES WITH A MAJORITY BIG ENOUGH TO SUPPORT VIGOROUS ATTACKS ON THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS. BUT STANDING IN THE WAY OF SUCH A GOVERNMENT ARE SERIOUS POLICY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO BIG

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PAGE 04 BRUSSE 03714 151746Z

PARTIES AND BAD BLOOD BETWEEN SOME OF THEIR KEY LEADERS.SMOKE WILL PROBABLY FILL MANY ROOMS BEFORE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER PRESENTS HIS CABINET TO THE KING. RENNR

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